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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Answers to Your Biggest Questions About Teaching Elementary Writing*.

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What Resources Do I Need for High-Impact Instruction, and How Do I Introduce Them?

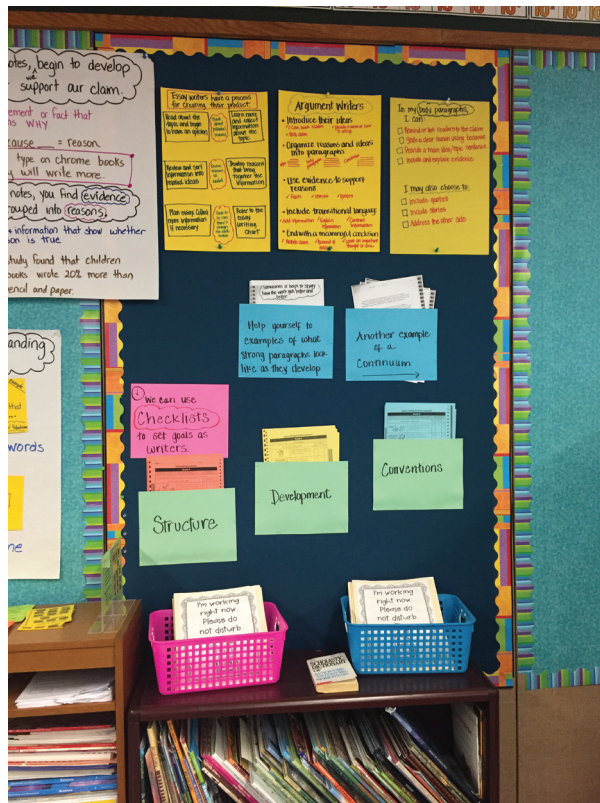


Resources should consider and build independence. Charts serve as instructional artifacts, and they can remind students of what they have learned, as well as how to complete tasks. Mentor texts are also powerful resources for students to access for independent learning. You might offer a lesson along the lines of “Today you will learn about some of the tools and resources you can use for your own learning when I am working with other people.” Classmates also become resources as you establish productive writing partnerships.

INTENTIONAL CLASSROOM CHARTS

Charts are helpful for visual learners and as a learning trail for students who may benefit from a reminder on another day. The more that students see charts as tools and resources that help them when you’re not available, the more learning opportunities those students have. If you create an “interactive” bulletin board such as the one shown in Figure 3.6, with clearly labeled pocket charts full of tools students can use, then you can teach students to take what they need *when* they need it.

Figure 3.6 This bulletin board is set up to provide charts students can take and use at their desks when they feel the charts are necessary or helpful.



Many teachers feel pressure to have beautiful charts, but charts do not need to be perfect to be effective. Students will understand charts much more if you create the chart in front of—or better yet—*with* them. When you create charts with your students, you co-create, share the ownership of the classroom, and set the stage for higher levels of learning.



Equity and Access

Students should know how, where, and when to access resources for independent learning so that there is never a line at the teacher's desk for help.

MENTOR AUTHORS AND TEXTS

Stacey Shubitz (2016) writes in *Craft Moves*,

Authors are like trusted colleagues we invite to teach alongside us. Their books inspire us, their personal stories and struggles resonate with us, and they show us new ways of understanding. We welcome authors we trust into our classrooms to help us teach our students strategies that will help them become better writers. (p. 15)

Shubitz refers to mentor authors; there is a difference between mentor authors and mentor texts, and both can help build independence and inspiration in your writing classroom. Mentor authors become people students think of as they write. Meg Medina inspires writers to bring repetition, figurative language, and other poetic techniques into their pieces since these elements exist in so many of her books.

Meg Medina's books to use for inspiration:

- 🍌 Medina, M. (2020a). *Evelyn Del Rey is moving away*. Candlewick Press.
- 🍌 Medina, M. (2020b). *Tía Isa wants a car*. Candlewick Press.
- 🍌 Medina, M. (2021). *Mango, abuela, and me*. Candlewick Press.

Jacqueline Woodson has written many picture books and chapter books that inspire writers. She shares about her process and the books' development on her website, <https://www.jacquelinewoodson.com/category/books-ive-written/picture-books/>, and these reflections make her that much more of a powerful mentor author for students. Many other authors share generous insights and reflections about their writing lives; when you have students who gravitate toward specific authors, do a little online exploring to see if that author offers some mentoring advice.

Mentor texts are singular works by an author that illustrate concepts students are working on as writers. Mentor texts can be picture books, chapter books, parts of an anthology, magazine contributions, or even unpublished texts, as long as they contain craft moves that students can notice, name, and approximate in their own writing.



Keep in Mind

You will notice that I talk about approximation throughout this book. Writing is rarely about mastery. It's more about experimentation and attempts. I've never heard an author say that they wrote a first-draft masterpiece, and the more you can build the mindset of trying out moves and revision, the stronger the writers you are likely to have in your classroom.

Using mentor texts involves a process. Before using any piece of writing as a writer, you'll want to experience it as a reader. After reading it, you can begin to notice and name the craft moves.

Keep in mind the importance of doing the work yourself, both so you can consider the cognitive processes that it involves and also create the powerful message for students that you are a writer. Like many, I am sometimes guilty of skipping the crucial step of modeling how I use a mentor text to inspire my own writing. Read the piece, read it again, and notice the craft move, name the craft move, and *try* the craft move yourself as head learner in your classroom. Students need to see what it looks like to try it out. They need to see the process of revision or interpretation of a craft move. Do not let perfect get in the way of the good because seeing the process, especially if it's a little hard and doesn't go perfectly, gives students more courage to be brave writers and experiment with new skills. Courage is an important ingredient for growth.



Great Resources

- Mentor Text Charts: This Google link (<https://bit.ly/3kHpN03>) contains a collection of charts I have made for specific picture books and information texts. Because many picture books are not paginated, I start the page numbers on the first page of written text.
- Dorfman, L. R., Cappelli, R., & Hoyt, L. (2017). *Mentor texts: Teaching writing through children's literature, K-6*. Stenhouse.
- Koutrakos, P. A. (2022). *Mentor texts that multitask [grades K-8]: A less-is-more approach to integrated literacy instruction*. Corwin.
- Shubitz, S. (2016). *Craft moves: Lesson sets for teaching writing with mentor texts*. Stenhouse.

WRITING TOOLS AND MATERIALS

Writing requires materials, especially for younger grades. Young students should know how and where to access paper, utensils, and anything else you want them to have. You'll want to take the time to teach students how to choose paper, as well as choose and care for writing utensils. Depending on the age, experience, and make-up of the class, you will need to be responsively explicit. You may even need a lesson on how to replace a cap on a pen.



Equity and Access

Paper is a powerful scaffold for writers. Depending on their fluency and volume, you can inspire or frustrate writers by providing paper with too many or too few lines. Offer choices of paper for elementary students. The number of lines can vary, as well as the size and placements of picture boxes.

Paper has the power to deliver important messages to young writers. Too few lines may hold writers back since they may fill lines and feel like they're done. In contrast, too many lines may overwhelm writers since blank pages can feel scary when you're not sure how to get started and the process is not yet fluent or fluid. Sometimes wide lines lead to messy handwriting, and sometimes narrow lines are inhibiting for students who are working on fine motor skills. Challenge yourself to find the just right number of lines for individual students with the same mindset that you establish zones of proximal development. The right number of lines for a student is the number that feels just at the edge of comfort.

WRITER'S NOTEBOOKS

Many students are ready to experiment with a writer's notebook by the time they are in third grade, while for some it may be earlier, and for others it may be later. *Rules* and *systems* are not set in stone but are rather practices that teach, inspire, and energize young writers to notice, collect, and celebrate before making decisions about bringing pieces to life outside of their notebooks.

If you think of notebooks as both workbenches and playgrounds, you'll help students understand when to use notebooks and when to bring their work outside of them. A good rule of thumb is that once writers are ready to draft, they leave the notebook pages and work on paper or a device. Notebooks can be filled with stories, reactions, ideas, photos, news clippings, poems, a napkin with writing when there was no access to paper, favorite words, quotes, and more. The more you also keep a notebook and share your own personal connections and the significance of *why* your notebook is important, the better for students.

I recommend teaching an explicit lesson of what goes in a notebook and what does not, although the rules, inclusions, and exclusions are not rigid.

What Goes in a Writer's Notebook	What Doesn't Go in Writer's Notebook
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas and lists • Favorite lines or quotes • Sketches • Strategies, notes, and tricks for remembering • Plans • Different or experimental ways a piece could go • Punctuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborate drawings • Torn pages (especially ones caused by too much erasing!) • Drafting • Perfection!

Composition books work well for students' writer's notebooks, and you'll want to have students decorate the outside of them with pictures, stickers, quotes, or anything else they find inspiring. This decorating process leads to ownership of their notebooks, and it also becomes a resource when students are stuck for ideas. Most pictures have stories behind them!



Keep in Mind

If students aren't using notebooks effectively, they might not be ready for them. Effective notebook writers require fluency; if it's still a struggle for writers to get words down on pages, then consider moving them back to paper for their entire writing process.



Great Resources

Books have been written about writer's notebooks, as well as countless posts. Here are a few favorites:

- Buckner, A. E. (2005). *Notebook know-how: Strategies for the writer's notebook*. Stenhouse.
- Fletcher, R. J. (2003). *A writer's notebook: Unlocking the writer within you*. HarperTrophy.
- Hubbard, B. (2018, November 12). ICYMI: Notebooks as a writer's tool. *Two Writing Teachers*. <https://bit.ly/3ozxE0G>

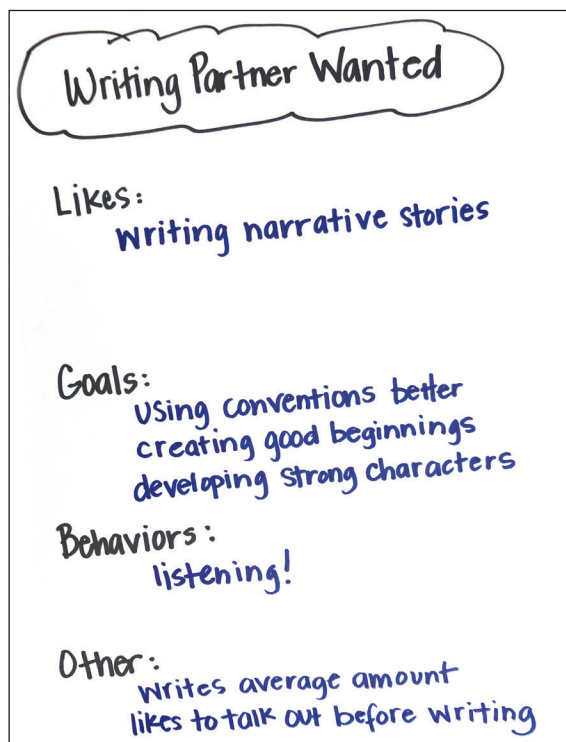
WRITING PARTNERSHIPS

Every professional writer I know has a writing friend or a group who encourages and supports them throughout the process. Partnerships in writing class have the potential to empower students and build an authentic writing environment. As you think about introducing partnerships to your classroom, there are a few considerations that will strengthen their impact.

Invite students into the choosing process:

Have students create “Writing Partner Wanted” posters, like the one pictured. These posters can be personalized, and they can also be differentiated depending on the grade. You might brainstorm different traits and categories before asking students to create their own poster and emphasize to them the importance of prioritizing their preferences.

Figure 3.7 Students should think about what matters to them when it comes to a writing partner.



Have students create T-charts of what they'd like in a writing partner and what they can offer, as pictured in Figure 3.8. Before students can really do this work, they should understand some of the grade-level expectations for writing traits and behaviors. I recommend spending some time teaching those before asking students to create this sort of T-chart.

Figure 3.8 Students can think about what they would like and what they would offer writing partners.

What I'd like from a writing partner	What I offer a writing partner
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• good feedback• someone who challenges me to try different things• Someone who is good at dialogue• Someone who takes their time and is thorough• someone who will work from home on google drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• good speller• listener• Compliments• good planning strategies• good suggestions• willingness to spend extra time

Some Dos and Don'ts About Setting Up Writing Partnerships

DO:

- Commit to these partnerships being in place for a while—at least for the unit, and possibly longer.
- Allow some partnerships to remain in place even when others switch. A strong partnership is a gift!
- Teach into how writing partners choose each other and what they might look for.
- Pay attention to students' input about setting up partnerships.
- Be ready to teach into successful partnership behavior.

DON'T:

- Worry about having same-sex partnerships. Boys and girls work really well together as writing partners in workshops.
- Be in a rush to set them up. Waiting to see how the writing community evolves for two to three weeks is fine!
- Have writing partnerships be the same as reading partnerships.
- Try to pair strong writers with struggling writers. Your strong writers will benefit by having peers who will push them, and your struggling writers may find inspiration and confidence when they work with people who are close to their own levels or working on similar skills.

Writing partnerships are an important element of workshop instruction, but one that requires careful planning and instruction. The investment of time in this area to establish successful, productive, independent partnerships is incredibly worthwhile!



Equity and Access

If you have a student who misses writing class on a regular basis for any reason, consider having that student be a member of a triad rather than a twosome. That way, there are opportunities for the other students to engage in partnership work and to include the third student when they are there.